

Critical analysis of raja ravi varma's art essay



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While evaluating the article on Raja Ravi Verma by Sidney Deb's Evaluation of Indian Art and Verma it is important to understand the nature of art forms under the perspective of Hinduism first as Raja Ravi Verma used a wide variety of motifs and subjects from this philosophy as his subject. It could be mentioned in an early phase of this essay that Raja Ravi Verma was a pious Hindu by birth and faith and thus his art work is heavily influenced by different aspects of Hinduism.

At the same note it should also be mentioned that Raja Ravi Verma mostly took the narrative structuralism of ancient Indian mythology as his subject leaving the insight of philosophical approach of Hindu form of painting as depicted in the forms of ' Madhubani', Rajasthani ' Kangra', Bengal ' Pat' or for that matter fresco paintings of fifth century paintings of Ajanta. (Dos, 18) However it should be noted that according to Deb, Raja Ravi Varma was noted for this realistic depiction of scenes from epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana.

He was recognized as painter who made a fusion between Indian and Western art forms in terms of academic art. His talents were highly recognized in the west because of the depictions of bright colours and stylishly postured women in sari. One such recognition came in 1873 with the Vienna Art Exhibition first prize. To the western world he is regarded as one of the most prolific painters of the Indian tradition. But this could be termed as a bit exaggerated in the sense that during his time (1848- 1906) there were other stalwarts of the art whose philosophies were not completely understood or conceptualized by the western art connoisseurs.

Deb mentions that during the period Raja Ravi Verma was working the most prominent of his contemporary colleagues were Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy and Gopal Ghosh of the 'Bengal School'. This was a school of thought process that was deeply influenced by the philosophic revival or renaissance of ancient Indian learning or values by the poet Rabindranath Tagore. These people choose subjects from both Indian history and mythology and juxtaposed them with the modern nationalist feeling of the time in late 19th century.

Their approach was guided by the philosophical essence of the philosophies of Hinduism with relevance to the political drifts and agitations against the British Raj in India. (Deb, 122) It was a form of painting with a mission of an extended approach of non-violence. (King, 143) So much is narrated about the Bengal School because at the same given point of time Raja Ravi Verma's approach towards painting was more religious than nationalist which stands a stark difference with his contemporary artists as he choose to neglect the philosophical and the most important part of Hindu or Indian painting.

Religion and philosophy are completely two different aspects of the trade. The religion of Hinduism is supposed to be formulated at around BC 2500 with the advent of the Aryans into Indian subcontinent. But the religion in the context of a Hindu is not so much a faith but mostly a way of life. It could be safely mentioned that Hinduism does not speak of a specific faith or code of conduct but is basically an accumulation of various school of philosophical thoughts.

Under this perspective a Hindu is free to choose his mode of philosophy where even the existence of a God is not mandatory. There are six main schools of thoughts called “ sadadarshan” within the parameter of a Hindu philosophical essence and four of these schools overlook the need of a God altogether. (Fletcher, 276) Under these parameters of Hindu philosophy, Deb mentions, Raja Ravi Verma's approach towards painting was more towards the depiction of epical and mythological heroes along with demigods according to Deb.

But while doing so he made them appear like human and thus followed the structural approach of western academic schools of the time. By doing so Raja Ravi Verma's approach towards painting became more western than Indian in these that he painted the women or goddesses of his painting modelled on south Indian women. Thus he completely overlooked the traditional form of art depicted in the Vishnudharmottara Purana as Chitrasutra or the Indian outline of painting codes. According to Chitrasutra there should be different measurements of human, gods, demigods or demons.

But Raja Ravi Verma depicted all his characters as basic human form. (Deb, 127-29) In the same context it would be relevant to mention the ‘ Company Paintings’ during the late 18th and early 19th Century. This form of painting was inserted by the officials of the British East India Company for documentation of flora and fauna of India for administrative and scientific measures. For this the officials hired local native small tie painters gave them the outline of western structural paintings.

The local painters did not give away their basics approach but followed the guidelines provided by their employers strictly and thus gave rise to an entirely new concept of painting. Raja Ravi Verma's paintings from an Indian perspective appear to be an extended and polished version of this form of painting. But on the contrary the western art critics saw the entire expression from a very different perspective. For the westerners these paintings were exemplary exhibition of vibrant colours and graceful womanhood against the background of exotic location and distinct clad.

Nevertheless Deb never fails to mention that it is not that the contemporary artists like Abanindranath Tagore, Gaganendranath Tagore, Nandalal Bose, Jamini Roy and Gopal Ghosh of the 'Bengal School' were ignorant about the minor details of western art and they all learnt the techniques of western painting but never gave up the aspects of traditional art form and these people incorporated the best features of both the world with purpose and greater talent that Raja Ravi Verma failed to achieve despite better acceptance in the west.

It should be remembered that the context of Deb's view is fundamentally influence by the nationalistic movement and implementation of Indian philosophy in art. Thus this article becomes a sort of critical argument on the psyche of the artist and his virtual alignment towards the benefits of the imperialism of the British Empire. However, it should always be mentioned that Deb presented all the arguments in clear, satisfying, provocative, and wonderfully crafted text with enough humor to keep a general interested.

His outlook could easily be termed as groundbreaking and is an essential reading material for every teacher, student and general art lovers. It is a truth that this article could be enumerated as a breaker of otherwise universal myths that provokes us to indulge into considering the artist at his face value and neglect the socio economical aspects of the artwork. From a personal point of view it can be mentioned that the before reading this specific article Evaluation of Indian Art and Verma by Deb the notions about Verma was that this person was a great painter of Indian origin and there was hardly any competitions among his contemporaries.

But after reading this article one is forced to believe that art alone stands hardly any ground if not rigidly backed by a firm ground of philosophy, belief and indulgence. It is the greater picture of nation and humanity that should be taken into account while painting or formulating a painting. Without these aspects the end result of a canvass or any other art form fails to be alive.